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Social Learning and Social Control in the Off- and Online Pathways to Hate Crime and Terrorist Violence

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ABSTRACT

Although recent years have seen a great increase in the study of hate crime and terrorism, there is limited research to date that explores connections between hate crime and terrorism. This study uses a qualitative case-study method to explore the competing criminological theories of social learning and social control to investigate their utility in explaining radicalization among hate and terrorist violent extremists. Our analysis demonstrates important similarities and differences across ideology and offender types in their career pathways. We find support for the use of an integrated social control–social learning model to explain radicalization and the commission of extremist violence.

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In recent years the research literature on hate and bias crime in criminology has matured, driven in part by the availability of hate crime statistics through the Uniform Crime Reporting program since 1990.¹ This expansion has paralleled a growing research interest in terrorism among criminologists.² Despite simultaneous progress in both of these specializations, with few exceptions,³ there has been little research to date that explores connections between hate crime and terrorism.

The potential for connections between both of these problematic events is apparent in recent research, which found 86 percent of a sample of 364 law enforcement professionals in the United States felt that the Sovereign Citizen movement represented a serious terrorist threat.⁴ The same study ranked hate groups like racist skinheads and neo-Nazis among the top five terrorist threats facing the United States. While it is likely that few individuals who participate in organizations that support violence against ethnic, religious, or racial groups actually engage in criminal activities themselves, it is not difficult to find case studies where such connections are apparent.

The role of social media in fostering connections between individuals and hate crime and violent extremist movements and organizations has been a growing concern in recent years. There is little doubt that the use of online media by hate and extremist groups across the ideological spectrum has become both more ubiquitous and

sophisticated.⁵ The Internet provides many of the same benefits to extremist groups as it does to other organizations, including information provision, financing, networking, recruitment, and information gathering,⁶ information sharing, publicity and risk mitigation,⁷ and improved coordination and the ability to deliver encrypted communication.⁸ In principal all of these characteristics could play an important role in the radicalization process.

To date, radicalization researchers have developed theoretical frameworks to account for this process in an ad-hoc fashion without necessarily utilizing existing theoretical perspectives from the social sciences to operationalize and define concepts. Criminological scholarship has great potential to inform this literature, especially established theories such as social learning and social control. Social learning theory,⁹ most famously connected to the pioneering work of Edwin H. Sutherland,¹⁰ argues that crime, like many other forms of behavior, is learned and that the principal part of this learning involves techniques for committing crimes and for justifying their commission. By contrast, social control theory, associated especially with Hirschi¹¹ and more recent developmental models¹² that crime results when social or psychological controls fail and that individuals are less likely to commit crime when they have strong bonds to family, friends, and legitimate institutions.

The former perspective suggests that individuals learn from those whom they associate with in small intimate groups while the latter argues that those with low social control or criminal proclivities are drawn to each other (“birds of a feather flock together”). A potential hybrid perspective would find individuals with low social control drawn to each other, but once they meet in cyberspace or real life they nonetheless learn methods and justifications from each other.¹³ The use of integrated criminological models to explain delinquency has greatly increased over the last thirty years and to good effect.¹⁴

Researchers have rarely used this strategy to further unpack the etiology of terrorism and radicalization in particular.¹⁵ While it is possible to identify isolated examples of terrorism researchers adopting concepts that resemble those from social learning and social control theories,¹⁶ none of this prior work draws on the relevant criminological literature nor have past studies mounted systematic empirical tests, either on- or off-line.¹⁷ To address this gap in the literature, this study utilizes a qualitative case-study method to examine whether social control and social learning processes vary across extremist offenders engaging in ideologically motivated hate crimes, versus U.S. antigovernment/society political violence/terrorism. We examine whether these two types of extremists share the same career pathways, whether they move in similar ways from nonviolent to violent participation, and what role social media may play in influencing them. The implications of this study for our understanding of both criminological theory and radicalization frameworks are discussed in detail, along with strategies to counter violent extremism generally.

Social Learning and Social Control Mechanisms and the Etiology of Extremist Hate Crime and Terrorism Offending

From a social control perspective, extremist movements, presumably including hate groups and terrorist organizations, are simply collections of individuals who “flock

together” as a consequence of their shared individual deficits. Self-control theory, for example, contends that people with self-control deficits are impulsive, seek immediate gratification, and engage in risk-taking and crime-analogous behavior.¹⁸ Other stable individual-level characteristics, such as neuropsychological deficits or intelligence, are also consistent with social control theories. The resulting view from this perspective is that membership in or support of deviant extremist movements or a criminal organization is simply a risky behavior that some people select into, provided the opportunity is available, which is consistent with the individualist perspectives of Yablonsky¹⁹ and Sánchez-Jankowski.²⁰

A closely related control perspective, social bond theory, holds that deviation from conforming behaviors is more likely to occur when bonds to conventional society are weakened.²¹ Youth end up in the company of others who also have weak attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs in socially accepted activities. As social integration increases, gang membership is less likely because the deviance associated with gangs can damage social investment in other life domains.²² For those youth who begin to engage in gangs and delinquent peer groups, they may become entrenched in criminal networks as their pro-social peer networks shrink. Shecory and Laufer recently found partial support for Hirschi’s social bond theory in explaining ideologically motivated offending by far-right Israelis who engaged in illegal protests against peace moves by their government.²³

This perspective has some obvious similarities to group dynamics models of violent extremism.²⁴ Although group dynamics often lead to conformity by the individual, the individual can at times also influence the beliefs and behavior of the group, implying that small groups that form for one purpose can sometimes be re-tasked through the influence of in-group opinion leaders.²⁵ This approach has most famously been applied to the radical Islamist case by Sageman, who emphasizes the dynamics of in-group affinity and out-group hate as integral to the radicalization process.²⁶ In a phenomenon termed a “bunch of guys,” a term he adopts from the Canadian security services, Sageman notes that many of the Al Qaeda operatives he profiled had radicalized as part of a close-knit group of previously irreligious friends, often immigrants who felt socially isolated in their new host countries and turned to the local *masjids* as a way to tap into preexisting social networks. After an incubation period in which these new friendship ties deepened to form semi-insular cliques, “the intensity of their beliefs spiraled upwards in an apparent game of oneupsmanship.”²⁷ The intense bonds within the clique and the weak bonds tying individual members to those outside the clique eventually changed the calculus of conformity and removed a brake on their participation in violent extremism. Subsequently, these by-now extremist cliques reached out through their social network to find a link to the global *jihad*, but only if they successfully found a connector were they able to join a terrorist organization.

By contrast, social learning theory emphasizes that small group interactions and communication are the primary drivers of deviant and criminal behavior. This perspective emphasizes the impact of social influences, particularly peers or family members. Within this context there is an evolving learning process that involves the transmission of defining behaviors as right or wrong through imitation, modeling, conditioning, and reinforcement. People will be influenced according to the frequency, intensity, duration,

and priority of their relationships with others, including friends and peers, who in turn help create and mold definitions of behaviors.²⁸ The likelihood that someone ends up in an extremist movement, or hate or terrorist group is influenced by the extremist hate group or terrorist group favorable definitions to which they are exposed.

Social learning theory explanations of group membership in criminal or deviant organizations focus on social reinforcement of participants through close personal ties with family and friends. It is expected that having family members, peers, or neighborhood acquaintances in extremist movements and hate or terrorist groups will likely lead to positive evaluations of membership in these organizations and increase the likelihood that youth will join such organizations. We could not identify any published empirical work on this topic within the literature on hate crime and violent extremism that directly applies and tests this model. However, Akins and Winfree,²⁹ Akers and Silverman,³⁰ and others³¹ have provided conceptual arguments for how such an analysis could be done, and Hamm examined case studies of terrorist attacks and plots through the lens of routine activities and social learning theories.³²

Although mainstream criminology has generally treated social control and social learning theories as separate and competing models, many studies have pointed out that variables from both theories are relevant and excluding them from analyses may lead to model misspecification.³³ In fact, there is evidence that the social learning process may mediate the effect of low self-control on traditional forms of deviance and crime.³⁴ Thus, both views might both be relevant to understand the different stages of the radicalization/indoctrination process. For example, in support of social control models, it could be that a lack of self-control predisposes some individuals to explore hate groups online but that once online (and in support of learning theories) they nonetheless learn both methods and justifications for participating.

The current study attempts to assess the utility of both social learning and social control models to account for variation across extremists engaging in hate crimes compared to anti-U.S. government/society violence/terrorism through a qualitative case-study analysis. We aim to identify possible mechanisms at work to explain extremist violence. As such, we created a template that captures key constructs from social learning and social control theories. We systematically employed this template as a tool for all the case studies to identify and discuss these key mechanisms.

Data and Methods

To examine these issues we conducted case studies of four offenders, more fully discussed below, from the U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) and the Profiles in Individual Radicalization in the U.S. (PIRUS) database. Cases were selected for heterogeneity³⁵ to provide variation on four key criteria: (1) ideology with two violent far-rightists and two violent *jihadists*; (2) offender type with two hate offenders and two antigovernment terrorist offenders; (3) time period with two pre-2005 cases to capture cases with a low likelihood of Internet use and two post-2005 cases to capture cases with a high likelihood of Internet use; and (4) whether the perpetrator acted alone or with others.

The data repositories used are key sources to assess both hate crimes and radical violence. The ECDB is an open source relational database that tracks violent and financial

Table 1. Case-study perpetrators.

Perpetrators	Ideology	Offender type	Time period	Alone/with others
El-Sayyid Nosair	<i>Jihadist</i>	Hate	Pre-2005	With others
Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad	<i>Jihadist</i>	Antigovernment	Post-2005	Alone
Benjamin Nathaniel Smith	Far-rightist	Hate	Pre-2005	Alone
Jerad Miller	Far-rightist	Antigovernment	Post-2005	With others

Table 2. Open source documents.

	El-Sayyid Nosair	Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad	Benjamin Nathaniel Smith	Jerad Miller
Court and government documents	16 (2)	11 (9)	2 (1)	12 (3)
Scholarly articles	0 (0)	2 (2)	3 (1)	0 (0)
News articles	136 (10)	52 (16)	147 (28)	32 (19)
Watchgroup documents	2 (0)	1 (1)	4 (3)	2 (2)
Books	2 (2)	0 (0)	5 (2)	0 (0)
Perpetrator's social media	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	624 (160)
Other media	7 (0)	11 (0)	6 (1)	1 (0)

crimes committed by far-right, *jihadist*, and animal and environmental rights extremists in the United States since 1990. The ECDB collects information on the incident, victim, and, importantly, offender levels. PIRUS is an individual-level database, tracking extremists engaged in criminal activity since the 1950s. The case studies were compiled to capture a nuanced understanding of the perpetrators' pathways.³⁶

Table 1 shows how the four selected perpetrators meet these four criteria. Selecting cases on these characteristics allows us to observe differences between far-right and *jihadi* offenders, hate and antigovernment offenders, extremist offenders before and after the onset of widespread Internet use, and offenders who carry out extremist violence alone and with others. Importantly, we also aim to highlight key control and learning mechanisms that play a role in the radicalization process.

The case studies were written after a review of open sources compiled on each perpetrator. Open sources were gathered according to search protocols for the ECDB³⁷ and PIRUS.³⁸ Table 2 contains information on the total number of open sources found for each of the following document types: (1) court and government documents; (2) scholarly articles; (3) news articles; (4) watchgroup documents; (5) books; (6) perpetrator's social media (including the perpetrator's family members' social media); and (7) other media (websites, blogs, etc.). The number of sources per document type cited in the case studies is in parentheses.

The research team created a template that included a series of questions capturing key constructs from social learning and social control theories, including both offline and online behaviors (see the Appendix). The case studies were developed to understand the life-course of the profiled individual, including major educational and life events, civic engagement and delinquency, and especially social connections and influential relationships. When possible, the case studies included original source material, such as quotes from the offenders that capture their own perception of the importance of specific life events. Abridged versions of the full case studies without references are provided below, presenting brief summaries of each offender's crimes, biography, and radicalization process.³⁹ Again, the goal was to isolate the role played by both learning and control mechanisms in these processes.

El-Sayyid Nosair (*Jihadist Hate Offender pre-2005*)

Brief Biography

El-Sayyid Nosair is an Islamist extremist who was involved in several Al Qaeda-connected terrorist acts in the United States in the early 1990s. Nosair was born in Port Said, Egypt on 16 November 1955. Nosair grew up in Cairo after his family was displaced by the Six-Day War in 1967. He studied industrial design and engineering and specializing in metals and graduated from Helwan University in 1978 before leaving Egypt for the United States on a visitor's visa a few years later. Nosair became a permanent resident in 1983, and then a naturalized citizen in September 1989. Nosair met a recent divorcée, Karen Ann Mills-Swinney, a former Catholic and new convert to Islam, in a Pittsburgh *masjid* in May 1982. He married her the following month and they spent several apparently happy years together. Nosair became stepfather to Mills's two-year-old daughter from a previous marriage before he and Mills had two sons.

Throughout his marriage, Nosair experienced employment difficulties, getting fired from his diamond-cutting job after reportedly failing to improve his job skills and attempting to convert his coworkers to Islam while on the job. He was then employed at a power plant, but was seriously injured after experiencing a serious electric shock. Nosair did not work again until he got a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning job at the Criminal Court building in Manhattan.

Nosair had several encounters with law enforcement in the years prior to the assassination. In 1985, Nosair's family hosted a young woman from their mosque, who accused him of rape after he told her to leave his home. Nosair was charged with two counts of rape and battery but was eventually cleared of all charges. Nosair's mosque also held a hearing to determine his fate as well, finding him innocent of the accusations after questioning his accuser. While Nosair's wife withdrew from doing outreach with the *masjid*, Nosair found himself unable to face his friends at the *masjid*, began losing weight, and sought solace in prayer.

During this period, Nosair went through a bout of depression, during which he stopped eating and refrained from sharing a bed with his wife, frequently sleeping on a prayer mat and obsessively praying. Despite the substantial distress the incident caused Nosair, it did not immediately precede his search for extremist ideology. However, the incident was one in a series of negative experiences that increased his anger toward the United States and preceded his embrace of Islamist extremism. His later work injury left him impotent and disabled, which may have increased his depression. He was prescribed pain medications as well as the antidepressant, Prozac. Nosair sunk further into depression over being unable to work as his wife supported the family, now forced to rely on food stamps.

Radicalization Process

At first a moderate Muslim, Nosair was very involved with his local mosque and attempted to convert others to Islam in the years prior to his radicalization. A former supervisor remarked that "Nosair had tremendous national pride as an Egyptian and seemed reluctant to adjust to American customs." After moving to Jersey City, Nosair

began to experience personal troubles that caused him to more fervently embrace his faith. During this time, Nosair began to read the Quran and pray obsessively. Although he procured a new heating-cooling job, he constantly visited the family's mosque, attended "secret meetings," and stayed until very late at night.

While Nosair's son recalled their mosque as originally being moderate when they moved to Jersey City, he claimed that the mosque became the most fundamentalist in the city with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) eventually calling it "the Jersey jihad office." At the same time, Nosair became increasingly intolerant of non-Muslims as well as moderate Muslims. Nosair's son remembered one interaction with his father, writing, "One day, I innocently ask when he became such a devout Muslim, and he tells me, with a new edge in his voice, 'When I came to this country and saw everything that was wrong with it.'"

As Nosair grew increasingly frustrated with his circumstances, his mosque became ever more fundamentalist, hosting sheikhs and scholars speaking to congregants about aiding the *mujahidin* in the Soviet-Afghanistan War. One such scholar included Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, a mentor of Osama bin Laden and a co-founder of Al Qaeda. This contact led Nosair to engage with other men from his mosque who were interested in extremist ideology and aiding the *jihad* in Afghanistan. Nosair's son remarked on the shift in Nosair, writing "there's no mistaking that my father is alive again." After establishing a relationship with Azzam, Nosair became increasingly obsessed with radical participation, joining other immigrants from Egypt and Kuwait from the area in buying guns and bomb-making materials for training related to the use of firearms, surveillance, bomb-making, and survival. The group trained at gun ranges in Long Island, NY and Connecticut. They also raised funds and recruited fighters to support the *mujahidin* against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

In reaction to Nosair's growing radicalization, the family's mosque pushed him out. Nosair began going to the al-Farooq mosque in Brooklyn and got involved with the mosque's al-Kifah Refugee Service Center, which was founded by Azzam. The mosque was already known for hosting radical clerics and scholars, including the Blind Sheikh, Omar Abdel-Rahman (who also appeared at Nosair's mosque in Jersey City). By the summer of 1989, Nosair maintained regular contact with both Azzam and the Blind Sheikh, becoming strongly attached to them. Nosair kept Abdel-Rahman abreast of his group's paramilitary training efforts, sending him updates. The pair also met to discuss the Kahane assassination and the New York City landmark bombing plot.

Prior to his radicalization, Nosair seemed to be strongly attached to his family. However, he proved prone to becoming withdrawn and distant with them when he was strained. As Nosair increasingly engaged in extremist activities, he spent less time with his family, straining those relationships. His son remarked, "not long ago, his family was his abiding concern; now we are competing for his attention with Muslims around the globe." Although Nosair occasionally took his children to radical lectures at the mosques and gun ranges as he trained with his fellow extremists, he mostly spent his time away from his family.

Nosair's marriage became particularly strained when Nosair announced that he wanted to take his family to Egypt and leave them with his father, so he could join the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan. Although the plan scared his wife, Nosair refused to listen to

her and he only desisted when his father said he would disown him. Afterward, Nosair's wife sought to keep Nosair away from the other radicals at the mosque, but he managed to keep visiting the mosque and his fellow extremists. In November 1989, an assassin killed Azzam and his two sons. This event proved to be a turning point for Nosair. Two weeks after Azzam was assassinated, Nosair attempted his first act of extremist violence.

Crimes

After establishing close ties with radical clerics and Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden affiliates, including Abdullah Yusuf Azzam and the Blind Sheikh, Omar Abdel-Rahman, Nosair and his co-conspirators began supporting the Afghan *mujahadeen's* *jihad* against the Soviet Union before escalating to paramilitary training and the plotting and execution of extremist violence.

After carrying out two violent incidents (an unsuccessful and unnoticed attack on Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in New York City and a successful pipe bomb attack on a gay bar in Manhattan's Greenwich Village that injured three patrons), Nosair and his co-conspirators carried out the assassination of Jewish Defense League leader Rabbi Meir Kahane, a far-right Zionist who advocated the expulsion of Arabs from Israel. At a Marriott Hotel in Manhattan on 5 November 1990, Nosair shouted, "It's Allah's will" before shooting Kahane and a bystander after Kahane gave a speech. Fleeing the scene, Nosair also shot a U.S. Postal Service police officer, who returned fire and wounded Nosair. With this act, Nosair became the first Islamist *jihadist* to carry out an assassination on American soil. He was arrested, tried by New York State, and eventually acquitted of the murder of Kahane but convicted of gun and assault charges stemming from the shooting of the police officer in a jury verdict denounced by the presiding judge. Nosair eventually admitted to federal authorities that he shot Kahane.

Before and after the Kahane assassination, Nosair took part in a conspiracy to bomb New York City landmarks and other sites, including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Nosair eventually faced federal charges stemming from the Kahane assassination, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and the New York City landmarks bombing plot and was convicted and sentenced to life without parole.

Abdulahakim Mujahid Muhammad (*Jihadist Antigovernment Offender Post-2005*)

Brief Biography

Abdulahakim Mujahid Muhammad, an Islamist extremist, shot two soldiers standing outside an Army/Navy recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas on 1 June 2009. Born Carlos Leon Bledsoe on 9 July 1985, Muhammad grew up in a Black, middle-class family that operated a tour bus company, Twin City Tours, in Tennessee. Despite being described as a happy child with a caring family, Muhammad's adolescence was marked by alcohol and marijuana use, gang involvement, and physical altercations, leading to several school suspensions and a couple of encounters with law enforcement. During his first year of college, Muhammad continued this pattern of delinquency until he was arrested on weapons charges in February 2004. Facing a fourteen-year prison sentence,

Muhammad received probation and the charge was dismissed and expunged from his record. Within the following year, Muhammad converted to Islam, dropped out of college, and moved from job to job, unable to maintain steady employment, which he blamed on anti-Muslim discrimination. On 29 March 2006, Muhammad had his name legally changed from Carlos Bledsoe to Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad.

Radicalization Process

After his 2004 arrest, Muhammad claimed that the prospect of incarceration spurred him to turn to religion. Raised a Southern Baptist, Muhammad explored Christianity and Judaism before rejecting them in favor of Islam. Muhammad became interested in Islam because a cousin was Muslim and Muhammad had seen Louis Farrakhan give a speech. Afterward, Muhammad began attending services at the Islamic Center of Nashville and made the declaration of faith at Masjid As-Salam mosque in Memphis in December 2004. By Muhammad's account, he was radicalized by the time he became a Muslim. Muhammad appeared to follow a strict *Salafi* interpretation of Islam. While he appeared to be strongly associated with the Muslim community in Tennessee, it is unclear if this included individuals with extremist views. Muhammad's father however asserted that a Nashville cleric directed him to extremist schools in the Middle East. As he became increasingly devout, Muhammad became distant and antagonistic toward his family.

In fall 2007, Muhammad took a job teaching English in Yemen, allegedly in the hopes of marrying a Yemeni woman, learning Arabic, and moving to Saudi Arabia. He took Arabic courses and allegedly studied at the Dar al Hadith religious school before marrying one of his English students. Only two months after marrying, on 14 November 2008, Muhammad was arrested at a Yemeni border checkpoint while attempting to travel to Somalia, where he claimed he was traveling to learn how to make car bombs. Muhammad's father claimed that Muhammad made it to a training camp in Yemen during this time. When he was arrested, Muhammad was in possession of manuals on how to construct explosives and silencers and literature and videos by militants, including Anwar al-Awlaki. Muhammad was detained for two months, during which time he reportedly began plotting an attack against the United States because he felt that the U.S. government abandoned him when an FBI agent failed to secure his release.

After Muhammad was able to return to the United States in January 2009, he learned that it would be almost impossible to get his wife a visa because of Yemen's ties to extremist activity. The experience prompted an argument between the couple, leading Muhammad to seek a divorce. A month before the shooting, Muhammad began working at his family's business office in Little Rock. After his return, his parents would later report that they noticed significant changes in his behavior. He reportedly was restless, unable to sleep, and became agitated when he saw news about the conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unbeknown to them, Muhammad began preparing for his violent plans, purchasing and training with firearms and using the Internet to research a number of targets across five states.

Crimes

Muhammad said he "came back to America on a mission," which became a plan to assassinate three rabbis in Memphis, Little Rock, and Nashville and then target military

recruitment centers and “other Zionist organizations.” He attempted to execute this plan on the last weekend of May 2009. Muhammad posted a video online on 28 May, detailing his plans to attack Jewish and military figures in revenge for American military attacks against Muslims. Muhammad specifically mentioned American actions at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and Bagram Air Base. After attempting to strike six different targets in three states with little success, Muhammad spontaneously shot at Pvt. William Long and Pvt. Quinton I. Ezeagwula, two soldiers standing outside an Army/Navy recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas on 1 June 2009.

Just after his arrest for the attack on the two soldiers in Little Rock, Muhammad was interviewed by local detectives. He told the detectives about his time in Yemen and later deportation and stated that he was angry at the United States for the killing of Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan. Muhammad was also upset with news outlets for failing to report the killing of women and children in the Middle East by U.S. soldiers. He accused military personnel of using the Quran for target shooting and urinating on it. Muhammad told detectives that he would have killed more soldiers had they been in the parking lot and that he was not guilty of murder because the shooting was a justified act of *jihād*. In a series of jailhouse letters sent to Tennessee newspapers, Muhammad elaborated on the motives for his violent actions and claimed to be a member of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, although authorities never found proof of this claim.

Benjamin Nathaniel Smith (Far-Rightist Hate Offender Pre-2005)

Brief Biography

Benjamin Nathaniel Smith was a White supremacist adherent of the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) who carried out a racist shooting spree over the Fourth of July weekend (2 July– 4 July) in 1999. Smith was born the eldest of three boys on 22 March 1978 in Illinois. His father was a doctor and his mother was a lawyer and town trustee; both also worked in real estate. Although he enjoyed a privileged childhood, Smith reportedly exhibited violent tendencies as a child and was not close with his family. He eventually became further estranged from his family, telling an interviewer that they were not on speaking terms. In 1996, Smith graduated from a prestigious high school, where he was reportedly an average student. He then attended University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) from 1996–1998.

After facing several disciplinary actions, Smith withdrew from the university before he could be expelled. He then enrolled at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana and changed his major several times before settling on criminal justice, allegedly in pursuit of law school. Smith only worked at a construction firm between attending colleges and was apparently unemployed before the shooting, although he never lacked money due to a family trust fund.

Growing up, Smith had numerous friends of diverse backgrounds. He immediately lost many of his friends when he assaulted his college girlfriend during an abusive relationship. While Smith had trouble making friends in college after this incident, he eventually connected with other extremists both from his hometown and within the WCOTC, including its leader, Matthew Hale. At the time of the shooting, Smith was in

a relationship with another WCOTC member. There is no documentation of Smith having mental health problems; however, reports surfaced suggesting that he was not entirely stable. His roommate characterized Smith as deeply paranoid as he would join campus organizations but leave after growing suspicious of other members. Smith also accused his roommate of going through his belongings. Smith also appeared to have substance abuse problems, using alcohol, acid, mushrooms, and prescription antidepressants.

Smith had a substantial criminal record. In high school in Illinois, he pled guilty to two misdemeanor battery charges, receiving a one-year sentence entailing court supervision and drug counseling. In 1996, campus police stopped Smith for peering through the windows in the women's dorms as well as groping women. In October 1997, Smith also violently assaulted his girlfriend, for which he was charged with battery. He persisted in harassing his then ex-girlfriend with phone calls and e-mails until she requested an order of protection. Other incidents included Smith getting in trouble with university authorities for possession of marijuana, drug paraphernalia, three knives, and a gun, leading to Smith being placed on "conduct probation" by the university at one point. He withdrew from school to avoid expulsion. In addition to a Driving While Intoxicated arrest, police stopped Smith, sometimes with other extremists, several times for passing out radical leaflets and he was charged once for littering.

Radicalization Process

Smith characterized his development as a White supremacist, saying "There wasn't a single incident that traumatized me. It was just a love for my race, a slow awakening of consciousness." Although he referenced his father's racial prejudices, Smith claimed that his "racial awakening" occurred in the eighth grade through his exposure to history lessons about atrocities against Native and African Americans and the Holocaust, calling it "mind manipulation." He claimed that the unrest in Los Angeles following the Rodney King verdict led him to grow frightened about White survival in a future race war. While there is no record of Smith engaging with extremist materials before college, his high school yearbook quote was "Sic Semper Tyrannis," which Timothy McVeigh had worn on his shirt when he committed the Oklahoma City bombing the previous year.

Smith also resented foreign students and professors he encountered, claiming that they received too much government aid. Smith soon began posting racist writings in dorm buildings and reading extremist literature, including *The Turner Diaries* and *Mein Kampf*. He also began investigating extremist material on the Internet, such as the Aryan Nation's website. Smith himself credited the Internet with cementing his White supremacist beliefs. He then moved from engaging with far-right materials both on- and offline to participating in the White supremacist movement. Smith recalled:

What sent me into action was when I was forced to live in the dorms at UIUC. I was from a well-to-do, mostly White area (with significant Jewish infestation), but now, I was living among niggers, mestizos and gooks. Whites were still the majority, but muds were everywhere. ... The university was going to great lengths to recruit them. This bothered me.

Smith formed the Odin Saves Ministry at school in the months before his withdrawal. He also began an individual campaign to spread White supremacist literature in the

UICU dorms and Jewish Studies Program, posting flyers and leaving booklets with Nazi imagery.

Once Smith arrived at Indiana University (IU), he dedicated himself to more extremist involvement, garnering media attention for his activities. Smith started the White Nationalist Party of IU, naming himself minister of propaganda; however, he failed to recruit anyone to the group. While leafleting for his one-man organization, Smith immediately caught the attention of IU's administration and attracted media attention and community outrage and protests against his activities. He soon encountered WCOTC recruiting stickers at IU and sought the attention of the Church, sending the coverage of his exploits to their "World Headquarters." Hale responded to Smith's correspondence and met with Smith. During their meeting, Smith asked Hale if violence could be used to help the White race.

After failed attempts at starting his own White supremacist groups, Smith finally found his place, joining the Internet-based WCOTC. In addition to becoming close friends with Hale, Smith engaged in numerous WCOTC campaigns, quickly rising within the ranks of the group and gaining a celebrity status both within and outside of the group. He grew more extremist, echoing many of Hale's beliefs advocating hatred of non-Whites and Jews as well as the separation of the races and expelling minorities from the country. Undeterred by the negative media and community attention or perhaps even further motivated by the attention, Smith fervently continued his leafletting campaigns.

Crimes

During the Fourth of July weekend in 1999, Smith carried out his racist shooting spree, targeting Black, Asian, and Jewish persons as he drove through Illinois and Indiana. In addition to injuring numerous bystanders, Smith murdered Ricky Byrdsong, a Black former Northwestern University basketball coach in Skokie, Illinois as well as Won-Joon Yoon, an Asian student at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. After Smith died of self-inflicted gunshot wounds as police closed in, law enforcement found Smith's journal, which included a "reference to a revolution on the Fourth of July" ... [as well as] 'caustic, venomous, antisemitic' language." Smith's journal opened with "Anyone who knows the history of this plague upon humanity who calls themselves the Jews will know why I have acted."

There remains debate over Smith's role in the WCOTC in the few months before the shooting due to differing accounts on the subject. It is clear, however, that Hale and Smith remained close and maintained contact during these months. To distance himself from the WCOTC, Smith sent Hale a letter, decreeing his break from the group due to his inability to keep his actions legal. Presumably, Smith was trying to protect the WCOTC against any potential retribution in the aftermath of his shooting spree. Although Hale emphasized that the WCOTC favored nonviolence, he wrote to WCOTC members after he was denied his law license, saying "I have been denied my most precious rights of speech and religion. If the courthouse is closed to NON APPROVED RELIGIONS, America can only be headed for violence." Hale's message of violence may have pushed Smith to carry out his shooting spree. Indeed, Hale believed his rejection

might have spurred Smith to take such violent action. In an interview after the shooting, WCOTC leader Matthew Hale asserted that “I have heard speculation from reporters that Ben was angry about my appeal [over my law license] being denied, but I don’t know if that’s true. ... He looked up to me in a lot of ways because I was committed to the legal fight.”

Jerad Miller (Far-Rightist Antigovernment Offender Post-2005)

Brief Biography

Jerad Dwain Miller was an antigovernment extremist who, along with his wife Amanda Renee Miller (née Woodruff), carried out a shooting spree in Las Vegas, Nevada on 8 June 2014. Miller was born 3 January 1983 and grew up poor, living in a trailer park in the Tri-Cities (the area of Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland) in Washington State. Miller grew up in a strict home with his conservative Christian parents and a younger sister. He dropped out of high school and soon started conflicting with the law. At one point, a childhood friend found Miller to be jobless, homeless, and likely using drugs. Miller was often estranged from his family. In 2003, he and his mother moved to Indiana after his parents divorced. He also failed to maintain stable employment and his mother-in-law claimed he refused to get work that paid taxes. Miller claimed to be making money dealing marijuana. Miller’s last formal job was reported to be at a McDonald’s restaurant, although he did performance work for tourists while living in Las Vegas, dressing up as various comic book characters.

Miller had few friends throughout his life, with one childhood friend remarking that he was a “loose cannon” in his youth, often fighting with others. He was, however, able to meet a woman named Amanda whom he dated and then moved in with in late 2010. The couple married in September 2012, later moving to Las Vegas in January 2014. Miller’s legal problems and antigovernment extremism often strained both his and his wife’s relationships with friends and family. When the couple moved to Las Vegas, a neighbor liked Amanda and considered the Millers to be friends. Both Miller and his wife quit their jobs to join the standoff at Bundy Ranch in April 2014, and their neighbor traveled with them to the Bundy ranch and allowed them to stay with her before the shooting. While at the Bundy ranch, the Millers failed to gain friendship with the Bundy supporters, who could be viewed as peers in the antigovernment movement.

Miller had an extensive criminal history, including misdemeanors and felonies, dating back to 2001. He had several drug and assault charges, leading Miller to receive a range of punishments from a few days to months in jail, house arrest, probation, diversion programs, drug treatment, payments of fines and court costs totaling thousands of dollars, and suspension of his driver’s license. He and his wife also faced legal troubles in civil court related to small claims suits. Once the Millers left for Las Vegas in January 2014, they had several contacts with law enforcement. Soon after arriving in Nevada, police took Miller’s license after he was pulled over and found to be driving with a suspended license. This prompted Miller to angrily call the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles and threaten to shoot anyone who attempted to arrest him for driving with a

suspended license. While the Southern Nevada Counterterrorism Center investigated Miller for the threats, the investigation ended without arrest.

Radicalization Process

Miller's exposure to radical ideology appeared to involve mostly his Internet activity after years of contact with the criminal justice system. He explained his radicalization in writing, stating: "It took the boot of tyranny [most likely the justice system] sitting upon my throat for me to finally open my eyes to whats [sic] going on." Miller described himself as "waking up" in early 2011 or so through the help of family and friends, although the nature of such help remains unclear. Based on Miller's social media history, his entry into the extremist movement appears to be largely self-initiated through online contacts and posting. By January 2012, Miller began posting frequently about his violent antigovernment sentiments on Facebook. He posted about gun rights, the government taking citizens' guns, starting a race war, tax protester beliefs, chem-trails,⁴⁰ the New World Order, UN troops in America training for martial law, 11 September 2001 conspiracy theories, secession, Alex Jones videos, and "Nazi checkpoints" in the United States.

Soon Miller's posts became more violent, with lengthy posts about resisting a tyrannical government. He referred to himself as a domestic terrorist and posted an oath to defend the constitution on Facebook. Miller became increasingly angry in posts regarding his contact with police and the courts and he shared a lengthy post about killing police. In May 2013, he told a judge that he did not recognize the judge's authority over him. Miller repeatedly asserted that he would kill and die for freedom and his beliefs, portraying himself as a future martyr.

Miller also engaged in conversations with his family through Facebook postings that ranged from cordial to aggressive. He argued with family members about not supporting him and failing to take a stand with him against tyranny and even suggested that they deserved death. Although he received some negative responses, Miller still had peers on Facebook who were receptive to and encouraging of his ideology. Comments show friends suggesting he go on InfoWars.com and AmericanFreedomRadio.com. While Miller's family frequently argued with him over his beliefs and behaviors, they sometimes supported his extremist statements, like his assertions about President Obama declaring martial law to take guns and the "one world order." He also received support on some of his more extremist posts, including posts about dying for liberty in "suicide by cop," attending the Bundy Ranch standoff, and engaging in sovereign citizen behavior. Although not an extremist before they met, Amanda Miller's presence in Jerad's life may have affected him in some way as his public extremist posts to Facebook started in the months after he started a relationship with her.

The couple moved to Las Vegas to meet and support far-right political candidates. A neighbor recalled that the couple also handed out White power propaganda. In April 2014, Miller followed the Bundy Ranch standoff closely, posting frequently about it. The couple eventually joined the protesters at the standoff. While there, news outlets interviewed him. Armed and clad in camouflage, Miller railed against gun control and compared the standoff to Waco and Ruby Ridge, advocating violence against the

government. While he posted positively about his experience on Facebook, it ended badly as he told a neighbor that other protesters told him to leave because he was a felon. On his Google+ account, Miller angrily posted about being forced to leave, writing “We sold everything we had to buy supplies and quit our jobs to be there 24/7. How dare you ask for help and shun us dedicated patriots!” In a May 2014 Facebook post, Miller openly requested a rifle to “stand against tyranny,” posting “Revolution is coming and we are not prepared! Help!” A month before the shooting, he also openly called for cops to be shot and put on display. In the week before the shooting, Miller posted his “manifesto.” In his final post before the shooting, Miller wrote: “The dawn of a new day. May all of our coming sacrifices be worth it.”

Crimes

After years of making violent antigovernment posts on social media, Miller, along with his wife, carried out a shooting spree in Las Vegas, Nevada on 8 June 2014. Their spree claimed the lives of two police officers, Igor Soldo and Alyn Beck, and a third victim, Joseph Wilcox, who was armed and attempted to stop the shooting. At the scene of the first shooting at a CiCi’s Pizza, the Millers placed a Gadsden flag over the body of one of the dead officers and left a swastika-marked manifesto. When they reached a Walmart, the second shooting scene, the Millers began shooting and Jerad Miller shouted that “a revolution had started.” After barricading themselves in a Walmart, Miller was shot and killed by police while his wife died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Analysis

Social Control and Social Learning

All four case studies demonstrate elements of both social control and social learning theories as all four men lacked important social bonds, which allowed them to drift toward radicalization as they learned extremist ideologies through offline or online sources. Each perpetrator’s radicalization further weakened their existing social bonds as they had relationships strained because of their extremism. Both *ihadists*, Nosair and Muhammad, possessed stronger ties to their families than Smith and Miller prior to their radicalization. Such ties, however, failed to prevent their move toward extremism and their attachments to their families subsequently weakened as they more fervently embraced violent *ihadism*. Although previously a devoted husband and father, Nosair increasingly spent most of his time away from his wife and children as he began paramilitary training with fellow *ihadists* until he eventually had little concern for their welfare as evidenced by his desire to abandon them to join the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan. Muhammad similarly was once close to his caring family, but he eventually distanced himself from them after he converted to a strict *Salafi* offshoot of Islam and before he came to embrace violent *ihadism*.

On the other hand, Smith and Miller appeared more estranged from their families before their radicalization. Smith came from a stable family much like Muhammad, but he did not appear particularly close to them. As Smith radicalized and became a prolific

WCOTC member, he and his family eventually stopped speaking to one another. Miller's relationship with his parents was particularly fraught as he was often arguing with his family or not on speaking terms with them. Unlike Smith's and Miller's families who appeared to have little to nothing to do with them, Nosair's and Muhammad's families were still involved in their lives and attempted, although unsuccessfully, to divert them from violent extremism.

All four men had romantic relationships with varying degrees of commitment. All but Smith were married; however, Muhammad's and Nosair's marriages were strained while the Millers appeared intensely committed to one another. Shortly after his marriage, Muhammad left his wife behind as he attempted to travel to Somalia to learn bomb-making skills. For Muhammad, marriage appeared to be simply a perfunctory union in support of his faith as he went abroad in search of a Muslim wife. When his wife was unable to join him in the United States, he sought a divorce, further indicating his lack of attachment to her. Although once devoted to his wife, Nosair's commitment waned as he became more radical, ignoring her attempts to dissuade him from extremist participation.

While both *jihadi* perpetrators' wives did not share their husbands' embrace of extremism, both far-right perpetrators had relationships with women who shared their beliefs. Although not married at the time of the shooting, Smith's girlfriend was also involved in the WCOTC. Although details of their relationship are not known, Smith's history of domestic violence with a previous girlfriend is well documented. In contrast to Nosair and Muhammad, Miller proved strongly attached to his wife, who also embraced his extremist beliefs. Amanda's devotion to Jerad and support of his antigovernment views may have emboldened his increasingly violent extremist development over time during their relationship and marriage.

All four perpetrators experienced issues with employment. Both Nosair and Muhammad were employed at the time of their attacks, although they experienced employment problems at the time of their radicalization. Both men believed they had lost prior jobs because of their faith. After converting to Islam, Muhammad dropped out of school and moved from job to job while Nosair failed to obtain employment commensurate with his education. Nosair's former supervisor remembered that Nosair thought very highly of himself and said he wished to become rich and return to Egypt, something his employment difficulties prevented. Importantly, Nosair's contact with radical Islam coincided with his work injury, which left him disabled and depressed, damaging his pride as he was unable to work to support his family. Muhammad similarly encountered *Salafist* Islam at a low point in his life as he was abusing alcohol and drugs and had just narrowly avoided a prison term for weapons charges.

While both violent *jihadists* were employed at the time of their attacks, both far-right perpetrators were jobless when they decided to carry out their shootings. Smith's unemployment left more time (what control theory would call limited involvement) for him to pursue involvement with the WCOTC. Miller abandoned his job in favor of extremist participation via protest at the Bundy Ranch; however, he was ultimately rejected by his fellow extremists at the Ranch. While unemployment meant eviction for Miller and his wife, Smith appeared to be financially comfortable as he was a college student living off a trust fund. The four perpetrators were also transient to an extent as

circumstances often forced them to move about the country. Further, Smith, Miller, and Muhammad all moved to be closer to extremist movements. Nosair and Muhammad sought to travel abroad to join *jihadist* movements whereas Smith and Miller moved to be closer to far-right movement leaders.

As for prior contact with the criminal justice system, all four perpetrators had run-ins with the law stemming from non-ideological violent and nonviolent offenses. These experiences appeared to impact all four perpetrators' turn to extremism. Smith committed several violent and nonviolent offenses, although violently assaulting his girlfriend led to the end of friendships with many of his apparently diverse and liberal group of associates. Smith's open and fervent embrace of White supremacist extremism soon followed. Although Nosair did not embrace extremism immediately after facing accusations of rape (of which he was eventually cleared), the accusations clearly affected his mental health and demonstrated his tendency to withdraw and engage in obsessive prayer in the face of stress.

While Smith's and Nosair's contact with the justice system impacted their radicalization to a degree, such contacts proved to be central to Miller's and Muhammad's radicalization. Miller's numerous interactions with the criminal justice system over the years strongly influenced his hatred of the government and he himself credited such experience with the justice system as pushing him toward antigovernment extremism. Narrowly avoiding a prison term shocked Muhammad into seeking direction in religion, which eventually led to his embrace of *Salafi* Islam and eventually *jihadist* extremism. All four perpetrators also had contact with law enforcement prior to their acts of extremist violence. Law enforcement also investigated all four perpetrators for activities stemming from their extremism.

Online and Offline Pathways to Extremist Violence

It is clear that the Internet played a more integral role for both far-rightists, Smith and Miller, compared to both *jihadists*. While Smith radicalized before Internet use became ubiquitous, online content played an important role as he moved from associating with a diverse group of friends in liberal campus organizations to fervently participating in White supremacist movements. In addition to engaging with the more popular books centered on White supremacist ideology (e.g., *The Turner Diaries*, *Mein Kampf*), Smith used the Internet to explore current extremist movements, perusing the online presence of groups such as Aryan Nations. For Smith, the Internet solidified his growing extremism as he once commented, "It wasn't really 'til I got on the Internet, read some literature of these groups that ... it really all came together. ... It's a slow, gradual process to become racially conscious."

As for Miller, his radicalization appeared to be entirely self-started on the Internet as his social media activity evidenced his shift from his left-leaning political ideas to his fervent embrace of antigovernment extremism, promoting right-wing conspiracy theories and supporting libertarian and far-right political candidates. Miller used the Internet to read and watch videos promoting conspiracy theories and antigovernment ideas and often shared such materials on Facebook. As expected, the Internet had no relevance for Nosair's radicalization due to its timing. There was also no evidence to suggest the Internet played a central role in Muhammad's embrace of violent

extremism. However, Miller and Muhammad, who both engaged in antigovernment attacks after 2005, used the Internet to post a final message related to their attacks.

Offline pathways proved more important for both violent *ihadists*' exposure to extremism. While the Internet also provided important pathways for Smith and Miller, contact with radical communities served as the point of exposure for Nosair and Muhammad at a time when both men were experiencing low points in their lives. As Muhammad embraced *Salafi* Islam after avoiding a prison sentence, he spent time within a Somali community in Nashville. This would suggest his time there led him to select Somalia as his destination to join with militants. A Nashville cleric also directed Muhammad to extremist schools in the Middle East, where he eventually attended a training camp. Similarly, Nosair met radical clerics and violent *ihadists* when he was depressed and withdrawn from his family after his work injury left him disabled and unemployed.

Offline associations with fellow extremists were important for both hate crime offenders as they closely associated with movement leaders and other extremists. For both Smith and Nosair, attacks on movement leaders served as the catalyst for their violence. Smith carried out his shooting spree after WCOTC leader Matthew Hale was denied a law license in Illinois, while Nosair started his violent attacks after Al Qaeda co-founder Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was assassinated. Both men's attachments to extremist leaders pushed them to carry out planned extremist violence.

By contrast, both antigovernment offenders largely lacked such strong offline associations and attacked targets of convenience after being pushed by failures in their extremist pursuits as well as personal issues. Both Miller and Muhammad failed in their larger objectives of joining extremist movements. Though Muhammad apparently made it to a Yemeni training camp, he failed to join fellow *ihadists* in Somalia and was sent back to the United States whereas Miller similarly joined fellow militiamen at the Bundy Ranch, but was rejected by them because of his criminal record and violent rhetoric. Somewhat paradoxically, their failures to gain attachments to fellow extremists seemed to push them to carry out extremist violence. Miller and Muhammad also started their attacks when they came across targets of convenience, whereas Smith's and Nosair's attacks appeared more carefully planned. Both Miller and Muhammad faced pressing personal circumstances at the time of their attacks. Upon Muhammad's return to the United States, his family reported that he was restless, unable to sleep, and became agitated when he saw news about the conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition to his marital issues, Muhammad's faith also continued to strain his relationship with his family as they sought to bring him "back from Islam." As for Miller, he and his wife were homeless, jobless, and penniless soon after they returned from the Bundy Ranch.

Both far-right perpetrators had prior contact with the media about their extremism. Smith's leafleting activities repeatedly brought him to the attention of the administration at both of the universities he attended. Community outrage over Smith's protests at IU also garnered media attention. Smith collected news coverage about his protests and used it to gain favor with the WCOTC. Whereas media attention helped Smith gain membership and status within an extremist organization, media attention appeared to backfire for Miller. After Miller and his wife joined the Bundy Ranch standoff, multiple news outlets interviewed Miller. Other protesters at the standoff eventually told Miller to leave in part because of his violent rhetoric, presumably including some of the statements he made in those interviews.

Both far-right perpetrators died while carrying out their spree attacks. While Smith died of self-inflicted gunshot wounds, Miller died exchanging fire with police during a standoff. Although Miller did not kill himself, Miller's Facebook posts indicate that he did not expect to survive his spree. On the other hand, Nosair and Muhammad both attempted to evade capture but were foiled by mistakes. Aside from their ideological differences, the offenders with weaker social bonds (Smith and Miller) carried out a more suicidal form of violence than the two perpetrators (Nosair and Muhammad) with stronger social bonds. Although both Smith and Miller had romantic relationships, with Miller being particularly attached to his wife, they both were largely estranged from their families at the time of their attacks, either not on speaking terms or antagonistic and indifferent toward their families. They were also similarly abandoned by friends for their criminal and extremist behaviors. While Muhammad and Nosair both subordinated their families to their extremist pursuits, they also both had families that made a strong effort to maintain a presence in their lives and attempt to dissuade them from extremist beliefs and behaviors. Muhammad and Nosair also had jobs when they carried out extremist violence, whereas Smith and Nosair were jobless at the time of their violent sprees.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although research examining hate crimes and terror has increased dramatically over the last two decades, studies examining the process of radicalization have grown in a piecemeal fashion with researchers developing theories in an ad-hoc fashion.⁴¹ These studies provide insights into the ways that individuals come to accept radical ideologies, although it appears they may benefit from a systematic exploration employing traditional theoretical frameworks to operationalize and refine concepts. To that end, this study attempted to investigate theoretical perspectives related to radicalization through a lens of two primary criminological theories, social learning and social control.

The findings from this qualitative analysis suggest that there are important similarities and differences in radicalization patterns between violent far-rightists and *jihadists* as well as hate and antigovernment perpetrators. Additionally, this study suggests that there may be utility in continuing to rely on social control and social learning theories to better understand the radicalization process. Table 3 systematically highlights these similarities and differences by applying the main elements from social control and social learning theories to these cases. The case studies provide consistent support for social control theory as all four perpetrators lacked important social bonds, which allowed them to drift toward radicalization, which then further weakened their existing social bonds. On the other hand, there is partial support for social learning theory as only two of the perpetrators were radicalized through in-person interactions with peers while the other two were exposed to radical ideology online. Social learning is focused on peer associations and there is insufficient literature at this time to tell us whether physical or virtual peers are more important. Additionally, in the absence of peers and/or loved ones, it makes it difficult to argue who they are associating with matters. While there is more support for social control theory, our overall findings do suggest utility in using an integrated social control–social learning model.

Table 3. Social bonds and social learning among the violent extremists.

	El-Sayyid Nosair	Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad	Benjamin Nathaniel Smith	Jerad Miller
Social bonds				
Marriage and family	Strong attachment to wife and children prior to radicalization that weakened once he radicalized; wife tried to stop his extremist involvement while his cousin engaged in extremist activities with him	Strong attachment to family that weakened as he converted to <i>Salafist</i> Islam and sought involvement in extremist violence; family tried to stop his extremist involvement; married but not attached to wife and sought divorce before his attacks	Weak attachment to family that led to estrangement after his radicalization; after he assaulted his girlfriend and they broke up, he openly embraced White supremacist activity; was in a relationship with fellow WCOTC member prior to his spree	Weak attachment to family marked by antagonism and estrangement; strongly attached to his wife throughout his radicalization as she embraced his extremist beliefs and engaged in extremist activities and violence with him
Peers	1 No apparent attachment to peers prior to meeting fellow extremists and he became very attached to extremist leaders and engaged in extremist violence when one was killed	1 No apparent attachment to peers except for involvement with a Somali community when he was converting to <i>Salafist</i> Islam	0 Lost friends after he assaulted his girlfriend and immediately engaged in open extremist activities and appeared to only have friends that shared his extremist beliefs; strongly attached to WCOTC's leader, Matthew Hale, and carried out spree after Hale was denied admittance to state bar	1 No apparent attachment to peers beyond his girlfriend who he later married; does receive some "likes" from friends on social media posts espousing antigovernment sentiments
Employment and education	0 University graduate, but failed to gain employment commensurate with education; experienced employment troubles and radicalized when he was out of work following a work accident; however, he was employed at the time of his attacks	0 University dropout who moved from job to job and claimed to face anti-Muslim discrimination; however, he was employed when he radicalized and when he carried out his attacks	1 Unemployed, but a student living off of a trust fund throughout radicalization	0 Frequently unemployed throughout radicalization and dealt marijuana for money at one point; he and his wife left their jobs to join the Bundy Ranch standoff and were jobless at time of spree
Criminal history and legal troubles	1 Accused of rape, but cleared of legal charges prior to radicalization; encountered law enforcement during a traffic stop following paramilitary training	1 Engaged in delinquency throughout youth, which led to school suspensions and encounters with law enforcement; his arrest in college on weapons charges that ended in probation led him to seek religion to change his ways; arrested in Yemen for attempting to go to Somalia to get involved with extremist violence and was sent back to the United States	1 Had a substantial criminal record for a variety of offenses (including violent crimes) in high school and college; had a few encounters with law enforcement related to his extremist activities	0 Had a substantial criminal record since his youth for a variety of offenses (including violent crimes) and served several jail terms ranging from days to months (and he spent eight weeks in jail in the year before his spree); he also faced a few civil cases with one ending in eviction in the year before his spree
	0	0	0	0

(continued)

Table 3. Continued.

	El-Sayyid Nosair	Abdulahkim Mujahid Muhammad	Benjamin Nathaniel Smith	Jerad Miller
Social learning				
Exposure to radical ideology	His mosque became increasingly fundamentalist, hosting radical clerics and he became friends with other congregants interested in radical activity	Claimed to become an extremist when he converted to Islam; he was introduced to a Salafi offshoot of Islam and became involved with a Somali community in Nashville; a Nashville cleric directed him to extremist schools in the Middle East; also obtained literature and videos by militants	Obtained extremist literature, such as <i>The Turner Diaries</i> and <i>Mein Kampf</i> , and used the Internet to learn about White supremacist groups	Appeared to be largely self-started on the Internet after years of contact with the criminal justice system; he used social media to engage with antigovernment videos and material, including Alex Jones videos; he used social media to post antigovernment sentiments
Beginning of radical participation	1 Started paramilitary training with fellow extremists and kept in close contact with radical clerics	1 While in Yemen, he attempted to travel to Somalia to join fellow extremists and learn how to make car bombs; he apparently made it to a training camp in Yemen at some point before the arrest	0 Started posting racist writings in university buildings and attempted starting his own White supremacist organization on campus and began leafleting campaigns that garnered attention; eventually sought out the WCOTC and became friends with Matthew Hale and became very active within the WCOTC	0 Moved to Las Vegas to support far-right political candidates; quit his job and traveled to the Bundy Ranch standoff with his wife and a friend but was ultimately rejected by fellow protesters for his violent rhetoric and criminal record
Commission of extremist violence	1 Started carrying out extremist violence when radical cleric is killed abroad	0 Decided to carry out an attack against the United States after he was detained in Yemen for attempting to travel to Somalia	1 Decided to carry out his spree after Hale was denied admittance to the state bar	0 Decided to carry out attack after returning from the standoff when he and his wife became jobless and homeless
Role of the Internet	1 Internet played no role	0 No evidence of the Internet playing a role in his radicalization until he posted a video before he carried out his attacks	1 Internet played an important role as he perused the websites of White supremacist groups	0 Internet played an important role and he appeared to largely self-radicalize on the Internet
	0	0	1	1

From a social bond perspective, all perpetrators except for Smith demonstrated key attachments to their partners and families before they engaged with extremist movements. These attachments, however, were compromised just prior to their radicalization. Nosair's and Muhammad's attachments to their families weakened due to personal setbacks (e.g., criminal justice contact, employment troubles), and only declined further as they became increasingly radical. Even though Miller was often estranged from his family due to similar personal setbacks, particularly his criminal tendencies, he remained strongly attached to his wife, who supported his beliefs. Miller's case history highlights

a key aspect of social control theory: all that matters is the presence of the attachment even if the attachment is to a deviant peer or parent.⁴² In the case of Miller, it appears as if this strong bond between Miller and his wife only served to reinforce Miller's extremism as she accepted and supported his antigovernment beliefs even as his rhetoric became increasingly violent. Their relationship supports similar findings of the influence of criminal spouses on that of noncriminal or potentially deviant partners.⁴³ Such relationships have been under-examined in the terrorism literature,⁴⁴ thus further study is needed to improve our understanding of the role of intimate partners on the acceptance of or reinforcement of radical beliefs. All in all, the findings suggest that the mere presence of attachments does not appear to keep people from carrying out extremist violence as these perpetrators radicalized despite weak attachments to prosocial family members or strong attachments to extremist partners.

In terms of social bonds to peers, Smith was the only perpetrator to have strong friendship ties prior to his embrace of extremism. While Nosair, Muhammad, and Miller possessed attachments to either wives or families, their bonds did not extend beyond their own families. Smith's peer group appeared at odds with the White supremacist ideology he eventually pursued as it was comprised of liberal-leaning fellow students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Although Smith started to read White supremacist literature and anonymously posted racist writings in university buildings while he had these friends, he did not appear to publicly embrace them until his friends rejected him after he attacked his girlfriend. This rejection may have pushed Smith to embrace fully an ideology that viewed his former friends as enemies. This parallels the other three perpetrators whose attachments to family similarly deteriorated because of personal setbacks, specifically related to criminal behavior. The Smith case is supportive of the notion that individuals may lose prosocial connections, and increase antisocial relations, as a result of their own involvement in deviance.⁴⁵ In fact, he experienced increased connections to extremists and became particularly attached to WCOTC leader Matthew Hale. Similarly, Nosair's ties to extremists increased dramatically after he embraced *jihadist* extremism, particularly leaders in the movement.

When looking at the aspect of employment and education, we also find that all perpetrators except Miller shared a level of involvement in these areas at the time of their attacks; however, the findings evidence a decided lack of commitment to such pursuits. For the most part, Nosair maintained steady employment, but he never obtained a job that was commensurate with his education. Nosair's first forays into Islamist extremism did occur when he was unemployed due to his work injury. Muhammad experienced issues with education and employment as he dropped out of university and moved from job to job after his serious brush with the law. He similarly became familiar with extremism during this period. While Smith rarely worked because of his status as a student, he did experience academic troubles as he transferred universities and moved from major to major. Smith also carried out his attack after Hale was denied his law license because of his extremism and Smith aspired to a career in law. Miller was also sporadically employed throughout his radicalization, but he and his wife dropped their apparently stable jobs to join fellow radicals at the Bundy Ranch. After being rejected by the protestors, they returned home to no jobs and no home and swiftly carried out their attack.

The consistent interactions all four perpetrators had with law enforcement suggest that these men largely evaded serious legal consequences for their behavior. Their offense histories suggest that they maintained weak beliefs in conventional norms and behaviors and were more accepting of extremist belief systems at odds with conventional morality. Indeed, Gruenewald, Chermak, and Freilich found that a majority of far-right perpetrators of ideologically motivated homicides had prior criminal records before committing their ideologically motivated attacks.⁴⁶ Although only a small percent of all extremists ever carry out terrorist attacks, it may be that those with prior criminal justice involvement are more likely to carry out such attacks, with the nature of their involvement and their perceptions of it influencing their behavior. Such interactions suggest law enforcement has an opportunity to intervene before acts of politically motivated violence are committed.⁴⁷ Since we followed the offenders here at varying stages of their radicalization, the case studies suggest that responding to dangerous behavior—as opposed to beliefs—may be useful.

The four case studies also evidence social learning processes as all four perpetrators learned about extremist ideologies either online or offline. Both *jihadi* perpetrators' exposure to radical ideology appeared to be the results of in-person interactions with fellow extremists, while both far-rightists' exposure was individually initiated with Smith and Miller seeking out extremist materials online and offline. Although the exact nature of Muhammad's associations with others interested in extremist ideology is not clear, it seems that he may have associated with others that pulled him toward radicalization as a function of his general search for religion. In addition to the Nashville cleric guiding him to radical schools in the Middle East, there appears to be a connection between his association with the Somali community as he converted to *Salafism* and his eventual attempt to join extremists in Somalia. As for actual radical participation, both hate offenders, Nosair and Smith, successfully interacted with fellow extremists, whereas both antigovernment offenders, Muhammad and Miller, failed when they attempted such engagements. Interestingly, Smith's online exposure to extremist ideology, as limited as it was given the time period, served as a stepping stone to successful radical participation, whereas Miller's online exposure and interactions in the age of multiple social media platforms failed to yield any formal radical involvement. Nosair's and Smith's involvement in extremist circles also proved consequential when it came to the commission of extremist violence. Both Nosair and Smith carried out violence in part because of attacks on their leaders with whom they were strongly attached. On the other hand, Muhammad's and Miller's failure to join larger extremist movements ultimately spurred them to carry out violence on their own.

This study also highlights differential use of the Internet between *jihadi* and far-right perpetrators. Even though Smith radicalized before the advent of widespread Internet use, the Internet still played an integral role in his self-radicalization as he sought out White supremacist literature both offline and online. The far right's adoption of technology goes back to the 1990s, while the *jihadi* community's use of technology is more sudden and has rapidly increased. This may be in part a function of differential access to technology within and across country, as the domestic far right in the United States has been online consistently and promotes a partial self-radicalization process. It also reflects potential for differential trajectories in radicalization by place. Although we did not expect Internet use for Nosair given the period of his radicalization, the Internet could have played an important role for Muhammad given the rise of social

media and Internet use by 2009. Thus, additional research is needed examining the historical role of the Internet within and across extremist group movements to better understand variations in technology use based on ideology and place.⁴⁸

Taken as a whole, this study suggests that there may be utility in continuing to investigate the utility of an integrated social bond–social learning model of radicalization. All four of the perpetrators lacked important social bonds and even when they had these bonds, the strength of the bonds had weakened prior to their radicalization due to personal setbacks, largely having to do with criminal behavior and/or contact with the criminal justice system. During this time, all four perpetrators were exposed to radical ideology either through in-person interactions or online activity. Once the perpetrators were exposed to radical ideology, any existing attachments deteriorated further as they pursued greater radical participation and eventually extremist violence. This study also demonstrates important similarities and differences between violent extremists across ideology and offender types.

Importantly, the unique nature of our four qualitative cases obviously limits the potential generalizability of these findings. In fact, prior research suggests there are distinct differences in the radicalization processes observed across ideological groups.⁴⁹ Additional research is thus needed with large *N* samples to assess the consistency of these findings and to better refine this proposed integrated model of radicalization. While the current study relied on a template capturing key constructs from social learning and social control theories to craft qualitative case studies, we aim to conduct future quantitative research testing both theories in a larger study. Furthermore, this study is limited to only Islamist and far-right extremists. Future research should examine perpetrators from far-left and other extremist groups.

Criminological research is also needed to test other theoretical frameworks to assess their utility to account for extremist violence, hate crimes, and radicalization generally. The use of other micro-level theories such as general strain theory⁵⁰ have been proposed, although the lack of empirical inquiry limits our understanding of the situational and foreground factors that may be associated with terrorism and radical violence. Additional study is therefore essential to improve our knowledge of the extent to which new theories of radicalization are needed compared to the empirically validated canon of criminological theories more generally.

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Appendix. Case-study template

- Overview
- Birth and Family
- Education and Work
- Friends
- Mental Health
- Military Experience
- Criminal History and Legal Troubles
- Prison

Q1: What are the similarities and differences in the entry process into violent political extremism (VPE), violent targeted extremism (VTE), and nonviolent political extremism (NVPE)?

- Describe the individual's entry into the extremist movement and/or radicalization process
 1. Exposure to radical ideology
 - Was there a noticeable change in socialization before and after their interest in extremist ideology/materials?
 2. Entry into a radical organization or beginning of radical participation
 - Was there a noticeable change in socialization before and after their joining of an extremist group/movement (if they did so)?
 - Was there a noticeable change in online usage/engagement before and after their joining of an extremist group/movement (if they did so)?
 3. And the commission of an actual criminal/radical act
 - Was there a noticeable change in online usage/engagement before and after their interest in VPE, VTE, or NVPE?
- What were the sources of their exposure to extremist ideology and what sources seemed to be the most important and why?
 - Was there an initial push into a search for extremist materials or ideology?
 1. Negative social interaction with peer group?
 2. Negative familial development (divorce, death of parent, etc.)?
 3. Individual failure at any pro-social activity (sports, employment, school)?
 - Was there an initial pull into searching for extremist materials or ideology?
 - Contact with a recruiter
 - Contact with someone else who was interested in extremist ideology
 - a. Was this individual a friend, family member, or someone else?

Q2: For VPE, VTE, and NVPE what role does socializing with other radicals or extremists offline as opposed to attachment to pro-social sources offline have in shaping or preventing the radicalization?

1. Do they socialize frequently with other peers?
 - a. Is this primarily on- or offline?
2. Do they socialize frequently with others who are in extremist movements?
 - a. Is this primarily on- or offline?

Q3: For VPE, VTE, and NVPE what role does socializing with other radicals or extremists online as opposed to attachment to pro-social sources online have in shaping or preventing the radicalization process? In particular, is it possible that offenders are very strongly attached to parents, peers, or religious leaders but are further radicalized rather than controlled by these attachments (as argued by learning theories)?

- Is the individual strongly attached with their parents/grandparents?
- Is the individual strongly attached with other family members?
- Is the individual married prior to joining an extremist movement/radicalizing?
- Is the individual strongly attached with religious groups or leaders?
- Do the religious groups or leaders share an extremist ideology?
- Is the individual strongly attached to peers (i.e., do they have a strong peer group)?
 - Are the preponderance of individuals in this peer group involved in delinquent activities?
 - To what extent of seriousness were these activities (i.e., mostly misdemeanors or felonies)?
 - Are any of the individuals in this peer group also interested in extremist ideology?
 - Are any of these individuals in this peer group also involved in extremist activity?